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U.S. PLANS TO SCRAP LOTTERY SYSTEM TO SELECT H-1B VISAS

The Trump administration has proposed to introduce a wage level-based selection process for H-1B work visas

MOVE TO PROTECT AMERICAN WORKERS' PAY

Replacing computerised draw will help counter the downward pressure on the wages of American workers due to influx of relatively lower paid H-1B visa holders, the Department of Homeland Security said. H-1B, the most sought after among Indian IT professionals, is a non-immigrant visa that allows US firms to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that need expertise | P9

WILL INCENTIVISE EMPLOYERS TO PAY MORE

- If finalised as proposed, the new selection process will incentivise employers to offer higher wages. DHS says this is a better way to allocate H-1Bs when demand exceeds supply
- The proposals have been published in the Federal Register, but their implementation may hinge on the outcome of the US polls

85,000

H1-B VISAS ARE ISSUED EACH YEAR, IN ADDITION TO RENEWING LAPSED ONES

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K'taka joins BCG vaccine trials against Covid-19

Four medical institutes are conducting studies on its efficacy among elders

RANJANI MADHAVAN @ Bengaluru

THERE may be a ray of hope in protecting the most vulnerable section of society, the elderly, from the dreaded Sars-CoV-2 virus which is responsible for the Covid-19 pandemic.

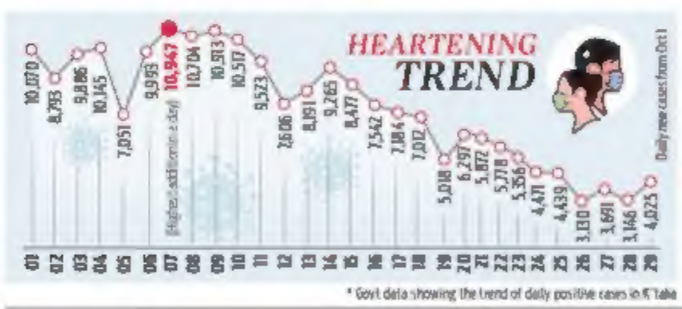
Following the Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) thumbs up that the Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine was effective in shielding the elderly against Covid, medical institutes in Bengaluru and Mysuru are undertaking studies to test its efficacy.

Trials of the BCG vaccine will be conducted at Raja Rajeshwari Medical College and Hospital (RRMCH) and Narayana Health, in Bengaluru, and Mysore Medical College & Research Institute (MMCRI) and JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research (where the trials are already on) in Mysuru.

The BCG vaccine is typically used against Tuberculosis (TB) and mandatorily given to children in India. Apart from preventing TB, it also prevents many respiratory illnesses. The BCG vaccines were administered in India as early as 1948, and, on Thursday, an ICMR study concluded that it was effective in the elderly against Covid-19. As part of the trials, which have already been approved by ICMR, the volunteers — all elderly citizens aged 60-80 years and free from Covid-19 and TB — will be administered a booster dose of BCG vaccine at RRMCH. Over the next nine months, the participants will be monitored for presence of antibodies in their blood and how they respond. P3

MODERNA VACCINE SET FOR LAUNCH

Amid the pandemic, Moderna Inc is getting ready to launch its mRNA-1273 anti-Covid-19 vaccine, according to its CEO Stephane Bancel. The company has signed several supply agreements globally with various governments.



* Govt data showing the trend of daily positive cases in K'taka

Bineesh Kodiyeri being produced before a special court in Bengaluru on Thursday | EXPRESS

OPPOSITION SLAMS PINARAYI GOVT

The Opposition Congress and BJP on Thursday lashed out at Kerala's LDF government over the arrest of CPI(M) state chief Kodiyeri Balakrishnan's son Bineesh by the Enforcement Directorate, alleging that anti-national activities were being carried out under the Left Front rule in the state.

ED ARRESTS KERALA CPM CHIEF'S SON IN BENGALURU DRUGS CASE

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru / Kochi

THE Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday arrested CPM state secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan's son Bineesh Kodiyeri in Bengaluru for his alleged involvement in a drug racket. Bineesh was booked under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, and sent to ED custody for four days.

Sources said Bineesh was arrested after gathering evidence about alleged financial dealings between him and Mohammed Anoop, who was earlier arrested in a narcotics seizure case. Bineesh had appeared before the ED officials for questioning on October 6. He was again summoned on Thursday. He arrived at the ED office in Shanthinagar at 11 am and, after nearly five hours of questioning, his arrest was recorded. The arrest added to the discomfiture of the Left Front government in Kerala, already reeling under the impact of the gold smuggling case. The back-to-back arrests of senior bureaucrat M Sivasankar on Wednesday and Bineesh on Thursday have dealt a serious blow to the Pinarayi Vijayan government's image in the last days of its tenure.

In August, the Narcotics Control Bureau's (NCB) Bengaluru zonal unit had seized a huge stash of MDMA (Ecstasy pills) and LSD blots during raids and arrested Anoop along with two others -- Anikha D and R Ravindran. The NCB probe had revealed financial transactions between Anoop and Bineesh, and the ED stepped into the investigation.

The ED had grilled Anoop in September and he had reportedly admitted that Bineesh had paid him ₹50 lakh for his restaurant business in Kammanahalli in East Bengaluru. The agency registered a case to investigate the money trail between Anoop and Bineesh.

CONTINUED ON: P7

FRANCE HORROR

3 knifed to death in church terror attack

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

IN another lone-wolf jihadist attack in France, a man armed with a knife killed three persons at a church on Thursday, prompting global outrage. This was the third such attack in two months in the country since the opening of a terror trial into the mass murder at satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo's office in Paris in 2015.

Though the assailant at the Notre Dame Church in the city of Nice was wounded by police bullets, "he cried 'Allah Akbar!' over and over," Mayor Christian Estrosi later claimed. Less than two weeks ago, an assailant decapitated a French school teacher who showed caricatures of the Prophet for a class on free speech. There were further worries as a Saudi Arabian citizen wounded a guard in a knife attack at the French consulate in Jeddah. Also, an Afghan national armed with a long knife was arrested in Lyon as he was about to board a tram.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined global leaders in condemning the attack, adding India stands with France in its fight against terror. But Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad was the odd man out as he said Muslims had a right "to kill millions of French people". P12

DELHI-NCR

LAW AGAINST AIR POLLUTION

In an attempt to tackle air pollution in Delhi-NCR, the Centre has introduced a new law through an ordinance that puts in place an oversight body. It also provides for a jail term of up to 5 years and a ₹1-crore fine for violators | P9

LTC cash voucher scheme for all now

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

IN a bid to boost consumption, the Centre on Thursday extended the I-T exemption available under the LTC cash voucher scheme to employees of state governments, state-owned enterprises and the private sector as well.

"The payment of cash allowance, subject to a maximum of ₹36,000 per person as Deemed LTC fare per person (Round Trip) to non-Central Government employees, shall be allowed income-tax exemption," a statement frpm the Finance Ministry read.

To avail the scheme, one has to spend three times the value of the deemed LTC fare on goods or services carrying a GST rate of 12% or more, and obtain a voucher indicating the GST number and the amount paid. The payment must be done digitally between October 12, 2020, and March 31, 2021.

Those who have exercised the option to pay income tax under concessional tax regime under Section 115BAC of the Income-tax Act, 1961 will not be entitled for this exemption.

HOW IT WORKS

If the deemed LTC fare is ₹80,000, then one has to spend ₹2.4 lakh on specified goods / services to avail the tax benefit under the scheme

EXPRESS READ

Shapoorji Pallonji seeks separation from Tatas

Mumbai: The Shapoorji Pallonji Group on Thursday said it has submitted a plan to the Supreme Court to end its seven decades-old association with the Tata Group. The Mistrys have valued their holding in the Tatas at ₹1.75 lakh crore, it informed the SC. P13

Eight core industries' output contracts 0.8 pc

New Delhi: For the seventh consecutive month, the output of the eight core infrastructure sectors contracted, dropping by about 0.8 per cent in September, mainly due to a decline in production of crude oil, natural gas, refinery products and cement. P13

Sebi fines Biocon staffer for violating norms

New Delhi: The Sebi has imposed a fine on a Biocon employee for flouting insider trading norms while dealing in the company's shares. P Ravishankar (not icee), has been penalised ₹3 lakh for violating provisions of the Prohibition of Insider Trading norms.

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